

SALT points — 6

"Verification" has become a key word in the debate over SALT II. It refers to the ability of the United States and the Soviet Union to monitor each other's strategic arms — and thus verify that the terms of the treaty are being kept. With effective verification, one side need not "trust" the other to comply. The prudence of this can be recognized without assuming that either side will try to cheat. So the treaty itself contains provisions to facilitate verification rather than deter it. In this spirit, even when US defense planners contemplate a deceptive mobile missile system, they go so far as to consider specific means to aid Soviet satellites in verifying that limits are being preserved.

In the current Senate ratification hearings, of course, the question is whether the United States could sufficiently verify what the Soviets do under SALT II. If the answer does not involve the American people trusting Moscow, it does involve the American people placing some trust in Washington. For the administration is keeping certain means of verification secret from the public, at least partly on the grounds that any Moscow temptation to evade verification may be reduced if the Russians are not entirely sure what all of America's verification possibilities are.

If this sounds like "intelligence" as much as "verification," it is no coincidence. And this gets to a central point in evaluating the verification aspect of SALT. The fact is that the US must know what the Soviet Union is doing in the realm of strategic arms, whether or not there is a treaty. If there is no SALT, verification — intelligence — will be or should be no less of an issue for the American government and people. Indeed, the requirements for that intelligence are more far-reaching than simply monitoring the observance of an agreement.

It should not be forgotten that, until now, the Soviet weapons systems discussed in arms control negotiations have been described on the basis of US figures. Only with SALT II has Moscow begun to offer its own figures. An important part of the treaty requires that each side state what it has. Thus there is a quick basis for discovering variations through the verification process. Other provisions make the very effort to escape verification a violation. So if the US even finds Moscow trying to

cover up it has reason to seek redress under the treaty.

Controversy remains on whether US photographic satellites and other means are up to the task. Do the situations in Iran and Turkey mean decisive loss of verification? Here is where the layman has to place some trust in what technical experts say. One persuasive argument is that, even though some observation of missile launchings depends on Iran and Turkey, the US has other locations that can observe missile reentry and thus maintain adequate verification on that score. Another question is how a cruise missile can be evaluated as to whether its range is within limits. Here present verification is admittedly weak, and yet relatively unimportant considering the stage of Russian cruise development. This is the kind of point that will become more important in a further stage of SALT.

We are convinced by the documentation of those experts in and out of government who find that, in the major contingencies for upsetting the strategic balance, the possibilities of undetected evasion by Moscow are slight indeed. Consider, for example, that any effort to sneak a new strategic weapon into the Soviet arsenal would require eluding US surveillance at every stage — research, development, testing, production, deployment. The US has capabilities for discovering clandestine operations at each of these points.

Without SALT it would be no less important for the US to have this kind of information. One basic warning: past experience with US intelligence, from Vietnam to Iran, dictates that those responsible for obtaining it should not be swayed from hard facts by anyone's political interests or preconceptions. But, with the verification provisions of SALT, a clear-eyed US will be in a better position to keep tabs on Moscow than without them.